

10/1/68

Dear Phil

"The Fallen Season" reminds me of what I hadn't thought of in too many years, the added eloquency of poetry as a medium. The poet can do what cannot be done in prose. You did it very well. I think I now understand more than I did.

Compared to my most recent experience, yielding to the suggestion of my wife that we watch an hour-long confrontation between three candidates for the Senate, what a shock! I read the poem when I got the mail this morning, re-read it a few minutes ago, as soon as the political broadcast was over. The lacerating of the language, the debasement of the mind, the inconceivable incoherence and total incomprehensibility of one of the candidates, at which we alternately laughed and choked (and he is the one who sought the debate), I gear made your language more beautiful! This is so beyond the capacity of the most skilled writer (which I am not) that tomorrow I shall try and get a sound tape. If I ever write about a politician, I'll use those words I could never compose! Someday I expect to become a novelist to complete the task I have assumed. There are several parts of the story that can not otherwise be told. I may draw on that otherwise wasted hour.

As poets are perhaps more inclined to be, you are charitable to the monster. To call Beckham a "pathetic fool" is to praise him excessively. He is a thoroughly, knowingly, deliberately bad man who preys upon others. He knows what he is doing when he does it. That is his concept, his way of life. He knows, wants to know, and will practise no other.

Your commentary on the local political situation is informative. I'd known nothing of your Cunningham ~~that~~ other than that he claimed to be a "conservative". That is one of the most abused decent words in the language, so misused by those who do the same with the other, "Communist". To me, conservatism does not connote Neanderthalism. I think that to genuinely believe in the Constitution is conservative. These people talk it but do not live or believe it.

I shall send a copy of the clipping to an associate who has an interest in Beckham, as the enclosed selection from his letter to me shows, and that paragraph of your letter only. Nothing personal. I think it will help him understand. ...What a commentary that his own lawyer told him to shut up. I'll send the clipping, as I sent earlier ones, to Jim.

I wish there were time to write more, as I do there were time and the possibility of visiting, to converse as one I delighted in, to discuss writing and other things. My own writing would be so immeasurably improved if I did not feel so compelled to rush with it, to make the record I feel is vital, to record what I have learned and know that others do not. Because I feel deeply, and because I rush, I write what and as I think. This tends to make it polemical when it should not be, hot when it should be cool (sometimes the hotter expression), loud when it might be louder soft. There has never been time to revise or do major editing on any of the books. They are, really, rough drafts. Some of it boils out in a way I find gratifying when I go back over it (like the epilogue of WHITEWASH II and the introduction to PHOTOGRAPHIC WHITEWASH). It could all be better. Not one of the books

was outlined; only one, the first, had even rudimentary notes. This is not a boast, it is a confession. The same is true of the three unpublished manuscripts that are done or close to it, or the several more than half done. I have twice written 35,000-word books in three days, then expanded them.

The surprising thing is that some ~~it~~ is as good as it is. Often, writing in heat, felicitous phrases bubble. One I like, that someday I'll use as a title, are, I believe, the last in OSWALD IN NEW ORLEANS: "shadow of a happy ending". How foolishly optimistic!

New Orleans reminds me of Thornley, of whom I've thought and heard little lately. He claims to have gone to something called The Freedom School. Ever hear anything about that, or did he ever mention it?

I'm going to California in three weeks. Perhaps I'll hear more of him there. He is a strange man, believing the most awful nonsense and writing some of it.

I just realized today is an anniversary for me. One year ago we moved into our new place. A poet should live here, it is that kind of place, with such beauty, quiet. My worry is paying for it. I have the money coming to me but may never get it. We have minor tragedies. Our woods abound in beautiful birds. The house is all Thermopane, wonderful in woods. I sleep under the stars and care little that it leave no drawer space, leaving none along the walls. But the birds, seeing through, think they can fly through. They break their necks. Today a brown thrasher.

Bed time, friend. Many thanks for the help and kind expressions.

Best wishes,